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Environmental Assessment
NEPA DOI-BLM-CAD-050-2012-026
for
Grass Valley Wilderness and Resource Protection Fences

Location: ***Grass Valley Wilderness & Fremont-Kramer DWMA***

CHAPTER 1
INTRODUCTION AND NEED FOR THE PROPOSED ACTION

INTRODUCTION

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes to build up to five miles of resource protection fence in two locations near or west of the western Grass Valley Wilderness boundary. These fences would be built across open terrain where BLM has been unable to stop vehicle trespass off of the open designated route system and in designated wilderness.

The first resource protection fence would be built near the western boundary of the Grass Valley Wilderness close to where the wilderness boundary abuts the Cuddeback Lake Gunnery Range. This fence would extend the existing Gunnery Range fence north by about 1 mile. This fence would be built to work in conjunction with a second fence constructed on the south side of the Gunnery Range.

The second resource protection fence would be built south of the Gunnery Range near the western wilderness boundary or approximately 1 ½ - 2 miles west of the wilderness boundary. Under Alternative A, this fence would be built near the western wilderness boundary south of the Gunnery Range. This fence would tie into the existing Gunnery Range fence and would extend it south across public land in Sections 5, 4, 8, and 16 for approximately 2 ¼ miles. It would work in conjunction with the fence proposed north of the Gunnery Range to protect both flanking sides of the wilderness area.

Under Alternative B, the second resource protection fence would be built south of the Gunnery Range along two open vehicle routes extending 1 ½ - 2 miles west of the western wilderness boundary. This fence would also tie into the existing Gunnery Range fence in Section 5, extending it south for approximately 50' before turning west and continuing 50' south of an open vehicle route identified as RM56, across publicly owned lands in Sections 5 & 6. Near the intersection of open vehicle routes RM56 and RM52, the fence would turn southerly and would continue 50' east of the centerline of RM52 in Section 6 to the 42E & 43E range line between Sections 6 and 1. The fence would then continue south in Section 6 approximately 1 foot east of this range line to the intersection of Sections 6, 7, 12, and 1, crossing southwesterly from Section 6 into Section 12 at this intersection. In Section 12, the fence would continue south 50' east of the centerline of route RM52 for nearly 1 mile before terminating short of Section 13. (See maps in Appendix C.)

Cadastral survey has identified the boundary and has staked proposed fence lines on the ground to insure that all fences are built on public as opposed to private lands. No open designated vehicle routes would be closed as a result of these fence lines. A 50' setback from the centerline of open designated vehicle routes would be maintained. The fences

are within a Desert Tortoise Desert Wildlife Management Area or DWMA. A 50' setback is the allowable vehicle parking and camping limit within a DWMA.

In the 18 years since wilderness designation, BLM has worked hard to stop illegal vehicle use of the wilderness area and to restore illegal vehicle routes. Wilderness boundaries were signed within two years of designation and BLM has consistently maintained signing ever since. A Student Conservation Association (SCA) Wilderness Restoration crew worked the entire perimeter of the Grass Valley Wilderness in 2001, restoring vehicle trespass routes, using minimum-tool, light-on-the-land, camouflage and passive restoration techniques, centering upon use of vertical mulch. Over the past ten years, this work has had to be reinforced multiple times with small vehicle barriers and continually repaired and extended to new sites along the wilderness boundary by staff and volunteers. Over the last five years, more than two dozen vehicle barriers and 200 wilderness boundary signs have been replaced as a result of vandalism and theft. On more than four occasions, unauthorized signs marking illegal vehicle routes through the wilderness have had to be removed and entry and exit points blocked off. BLM has committed 25% of a full-time Park Ranger's time to maintaining signing and vehicle barriers in the area. BLM Law Enforcement officers patrol the area regularly in cool weather months corresponding to the bird hunting and the off-road vehicle use seasons.

Last year (2011-2012), Student Conservation Association (SCA) Wilderness Restoration crews removed several attractive nuisances (unneeded, old range developments) associated with vehicle trespass within the Grass Valley Wilderness, including the removal of more than 8.3 miles of old barb wire fence. This fence spanned the entire width of the wilderness area and was responsible for funneling and directing substantial amounts of dirt bike, ATV, and even 4-wheel vehicle traffic through the area. Crews also repaired and extended an old fence line along the southern wilderness boundary and restored several vehicle trespass routes behind this repaired fence line. They also worked east of the Grass Valley corridor, restoring the old fence line and associated single track vehicle trespass routes that also terminated at the repaired fence line. New restoration efforts were undertaken only after the southern boundary fence was repaired to protect the restoration sites.

Today seven miles of unrestored fence line and several miles of associated vehicle trespass routes on the west side of the Grass Valley corridor remain open and vulnerable, subject to frequent and recurring illegal vehicle use. Vehicle users continue to drive through old restoration sites, around signs and short vehicle barriers, off of the designated route system and into wilderness. The old fence line through wilderness west of the corridor is still being used despite its relative obscurity. Vehicle trespass is occurring at multiple locations off of the designated route system, immediately off of RM56 & RM52, and all along the western Grass Valley wilderness boundary. These trespasses will not stop until restoration is coupled with fences or some other kind of substantial hard vehicle barriers. Vehicle trespass has to stop for new restoration efforts to be effective, for restoration to finally take hold and work.

Hard vehicle barriers (the proposed fences) are needed to replace "soft" barriers, where camouflaging routes, discrete vehicle barriers, an ongoing signing program, and public outreach have not stopped vandalism and illegal vehicle use in the area. The proposed fences are designed to work in conjunction with all restoration efforts underway and to stop illegal vehicle use in the area. BLM hopes to maximize the effectiveness of all efforts to stop illegal vehicle use in the area by completing them within the same short time frame.

PURPOSE AND NEED

The proposed action is needed to bring the Grass Valley Wilderness into conformance with the Wilderness Act of 1964, the California Desert Protection Act of 1994, and BLM regulations and policies regarding use and administration of designated wilderness areas. By definition, a wilderness is an area of "undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation." It is an area "where earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man." It is an area that has been set aside to provide "outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation." (Section 2(c), Wilderness Act of 1964) The Grass Valley Wilderness must be preserved and protected by BLM as wilderness in accordance with applicable laws, regulations, and BLM policies.

Untrammeledness, naturalness, and opportunities for solitude and primitive and unconfined recreation are the hallmarks of wilderness. Permanent roads and use of temporary roads, motor vehicles and motorized equipment and other forms of mechanical transport are prohibited by the Wilderness Act of 1964, except as specifically provided for in the Act, and subject to existing private rights (Section 4(c); 43 CFR 6302.20). Currently, the wilderness character and values of the Grass Valley Wilderness are being degraded by chronic off-road vehicle use of the area. Off-road vehicle use scars landscapes, fragments habitat, disrupts quiet, and interferes with opportunities for solitude and quality primitive and unconfined recreation. As the administering agency BLM is required to protect and preserve the wilderness area's natural condition, and its future as wilderness.

BLM also has a responsibility to stop vehicle travel off of the designated open vehicle route system within Limited Use areas generally, and more specifically, within designated critical habitat, i.e., the Desert tortoise DWMA. (See below.)

CONFORMANCE WITH BLM LAND USE PLAN(S)

The proposed action has been analyzed and has been found to be within the scope of the following land use plans and has been found to be in compliance with the goals and objectives of these documents (as required by 43 CFR 1610.5):

> The California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan (1980), as amended.

Wilderness Element: Wilderness areas are to be managed in an unimpaired state, preserving wilderness character and values as proscribed by the 1964 Wilderness Act and the 1994 California Desert Protection Act.

Recreation and Motorized-Vehicle Access Elements: BLM will provide and identify acceptable vehicle routes of travel. Visual resource management objectives will be met per multiple-use class guidelines. Vehicle travel will be limited only to approved and/or designated routes of travel within Limited Use Areas. Vehicle travel will not be allowed within any Congressionally-designated wilderness area.

Both Recreation and Motorized-Vehicle Access Elements are bound by 43 CFR 8342.1(1981). Motor vehicle areas and trails shall be located to minimize damage to soils… and in natural areas, only where off-road vehicle use would not adversely affect the natural, esthetic, scenic, or other values for which such areas are established.

West Mojave (WEMO) Plan: A Habitat Conservation Plan and California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment (2005):

Within designated Desert Wildlife Management Areas (DWMAs) such as the Fremont-Kramer DWMA, "recovery actions will be implemented to provide for the long-term persistence of viable Desert tortoise populations and the ecosystems upon which they depend." (3-71, WEMO).

The establishment of "secure, large reserves are especially critical because of the severe population declines and heavy human use in these areas." Within DWMAs, roadless sections of public land need to be protected from off-road vehicle use. (3-72, WEMO).

RELATIONSHIPS TO STATUTES, REGULATIONS AND OTHER PLANS

The proposed action has been analyzed within the scope of the following statutes, regulations, and policy and has been found to be consistent with:

The Wilderness Act of 1964
The California Desert Protection Act of 1994
36 CFR Parts 6300 Wilderness Management; Final Rule (2000)
BLM Manual H-8560
Threatened and Endangered Species Act (1973)
Archeological Resources Protection Act (ARPA) (1979)
Section 106 of National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) of 1966, as amended (2000)
The Federal Land Management Policy Act (FLPMA) of 1976

CHAPTER 2
DESCRIPTION OF ALTERNATIVES

INTRODUCTION

NEPA requires that the EA analyze the proposed action and other alternatives to provide a comparison among feasible alternatives, "thus sharply defining the issues and providing a clear basis for choice among the options by the decision maker and the public." (Title 40 CFR 1502.14) This EA analyzes the impacts of the proposed action, including construction of a northern resource protection fence near the wilderness boundary, and alternatives A and B for constructing a second southern resource protection fence near or west of the wilderness boundary, and the no action alternative. The restoration alone alternative was rejected for further analysis for the reasons described below.

PROPOSED ACTION COMMON TO ALL ALTERNATIVES

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) proposes to build up to five miles of resource protection fence in two locations near or west of the Grass Valley Wilderness boundary. These fences would be built across open terrain where BLM has been unable to stop chronic vehicle trespass off-route and in wilderness or to protect restoration sites from continuing off-road vehicle use and damage. (See Maps in Appendix C.)

The first fence would occur under all alternatives and would extend the existing eastern Gunnery Range fence north for up to one mile to a rock outcrop near the wilderness boundary in Section 20. The fence would terminate before intersecting private land in Section 16.

The second fence would be built south of the Gunnery Range and would extend the existing eastern Gunnery Range fence to the south either near the wilderness boundary or 1 ½ - 2 miles west of the wilderness boundary. These alternatives are described in more detail under Wilderness Resource Protection Only Alternative A and Multiple Resources Protection Alternative B.

All fences would be built on public land with locked gates installed across established access routes to private property to allow for owner access to their in-holdings. Fences would be composed of wood braces, T-posts, and three to four strands of smooth wire. Pedestrian-equestrian step-overs would be incorporated into all fence lines to provide for foot and equestrian access and appropriate public uses of the wilderness area. Resource protection signs would be installed at regular intervals along the perimeter of the fence lines. All vehicle incursions on public land behind fence lines, except for established routes providing access to private property, would be restored by hand crews to line of sight, using standard minimum tool camouflage and restoration techniques developed by the Student Conservation Association (SCA) Restoration Corps. The footprint of all fence lines removed from wilderness would also be restored in this way, except where contraindicated by staff archeologists. Some broadcast seeding of native species may

also occur. All restoration efforts would follow guidelines outlined in the Ridgecrest Wilderness Restoration Programmatic Environmental Assessment (EA CA065-99-73).

WILDERNESS RESOURCE PROTECTION ONLY ALTERNATIVE A

Under this alternative, the second western fence to be built south of the Gunnery Range would extend the existing eastern Gunnery Range fence south near the wilderness boundary for approximately 2 ¼ miles. This fence would be built on public land in Sections 5, 4, 8, and 16 and would terminate before crossing private property in Section 16. The fence would work in conjunction with the fence proposed north of the eastern Gunnery Range fence to protect the most heavily-trespassed and vulnerable sections of the western half of the Grass Valley Wilderness. (See Detail Alternative A Map in Appendix C.)

MULTIPLE RESOURCES PROTECTION ALTERNATIVE B

Under this alternative, the second western fence to be built south of the Gunnery Range would be configured differently to protect a larger unroaded area adjacent to wilderness from chronic vehicle trespass while also protecting wilderness. Under Alternative B, the second resource protection fence would be built south of the Gunnery Range along two open vehicle routes extending 1 ½ - 2 miles west of the western wilderness boundary. This fence would also tie into the existing Gunnery Range fence in Section 5, extending it south for approximately 50' before turning west and continuing 50' south of an open vehicle route identified as RM56, across publicly owned lands in Sections 5 & 6. Near the intersection of open vehicle routes RM56 and RM52, the fence would turn southerly and would continue 50' east of the centerline of RM52 in Section 6 to the 42E & 43E range line between Sections 6 and 1. The fence would then continue south in Section 6 approximately 1 foot east of this range line to the intersection of Sections 6, 7, 12, and 1, crossing southwesterly from Section 6 into Section 12 at this intersection. In Section 12, the fence would continue south 50' east of the centerline of route RM52 for nearly 1 mile before terminating short of private land in Section 13. (See Detail Alternative B Map in Appendix C.)

The exact location of this fence line has been determined on the ground by BLM Cadastral Survey. This was necessary to ensure that the fence is built on public, not private land.

Alternative B was developed as a consequence of field checking the fence line proposed in Alternative A. BLM staff found multiple vehicle tracks extending in all directions in unroaded sections of BLM lands (Sections 5, 6 & 8) adjoining wilderness. An extensive cultural site and a high concentration of active tortoises were also found in the area. Illegal vehicle use is threatening these other resources, as well as contributing to vehicle trespass within wilderness. Staff archeologists and wildlife biologists have indicated that they would prefer to locate fence lines on the periphery of these resources rather than across them, both to protect them and to stop off-road vehicle users from trailing fence lines across areas where sensitive resources are located.

THE RESTORATION ONLY ALTERNATIVE REJECTED FROM FURTHER ANALYSIS

An alternative not selected for further analysis was relying on using restoration alone to stop vehicle trespass along the western boundary of this wilderness area. Over the past 10 years, restoration crews, staff, and volunteers have restored and re-restored trespass sites using camouflage and passive restoration techniques along the western boundary of the Grass Valley Wilderness with little to no success. It appears that restoration alone will not keep vehicle users from violating this boundary or from compromising cultural sites and valuable tortoise habitat on the immediate approach to these boundaries.

NO ACTION

Under the no action alternative, the proposed fences would not be constructed to stop chronic vehicle use of the wilderness area or to protect restoration sites long enough for them to recover.

Within these constraints, only the **No Action Alternative**, **Proposed Action**, **Wilderness Resource Protection Only Alternative A**, and **Multiple Resources Protection Alternative B** will be analyzed in this document. The No Action alternative is considered and analyzed to provide a baseline for comparison of the impacts of the proposed action and the two alternatives.

CHAPTER 3
AFFECTED ENVIRONMENT and ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

INTRODUCTION AND GENERAL SETTING

The Grass Valley Wilderness comprises 30,121 acres. It is one of two Ridgecrest wildernesses located in the Red Mountain Subregion of the Western Mojave Desert. It is located approximately 20 miles southeast of Ridgecrest, CA; southeast of the Golden Valley Wilderness and east of Cuddeback Lake off of Highway 395. It is bordered by dirt roads RM50 (Twenty Mule Team Road) to Blackwater Well and RM100 to the Naval Air Weapons Station (NAWS) on the north, NAWS on the east, dirt road BM6381 on the south, and the inactive Cuddeback Air Force Gunnery Range on the west. Grass Valley, the main geographic feature of this wilderness, comprises nearly two-thirds of the area. The wilderness also encompasses several distinctive low to mid-elevation hills rising from 200 feet to 600 feet above the desert floor. It is bisected by an open vehicle corridor with a jeep trail identified as RM1777.

The wilderness area is located within one of four Desert Wildlife Management Areas or DWMAs established by the 2005 West Mojave (WEMO) Plan Amendment to the California Desert Conservation Area Plan. WEMO was developed as a habitat conservation and recovery plan for the Desert tortoise and many other sensitive, threatened and/or endangered species. The Grass Valley Wilderness lies within the

Fremont-Kramer DWMA which extends over most of the Red Mountain Subregion. The wilderness also lies within a Mohave Ground Squirrel Conservation Area established by WEMO. These areas provide critical habitat for these two species, the Desert tortoise (a federally listed species) and the Mohave ground squirrel (a California state listed species).

The BLM has considered the following critical environmental elements and finds that they are not present and/or are not affected by the project and are therefore excluded from this analysis: (1) Environmental Justice, (2) Farmlands, Prime/Unique, (3) Fire Management Objectives, (4) Floodplains, (5) Forestry, (6) Geothermal, (7) Minerals, (8) Native American Religious Concerns, (9) Paleontology, (10) Socioeconomics, (11) Water Quality, (12) Wetlands and Riparian, (13) Wild Horse & Burros, and (14) Wild & Scenic Rivers.

The critical elements of the human environment that were identified by BLM specialists as likely to be impacted by the proposed action or alternatives are: (1) Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs), (2) Air, (3) Livestock Management, (4) Cultural Resources, (5) Recreation, (6) Soils, (7) Vegetation, (8) Lands, (9) Wastes and Hazardous Materials, (10) Visual Resources, (11) Wilderness, and (12) Wildlife and Threatened and Endangered Species.

DIRECT AND INDIRECT IMPACTS

The following discussion describes the affected environment for each resource and the impacts that would occur from the proposed action and alternatives. It explains the mitigations that would need to occur for each resource under the proposed action and alternatives, and then describes the residual impacts of the proposed action and alternatives after application of the mitigations. Impacts include all direct, indirect, and residual/cumulative impacts.

Area of Critical Environmental Concern

Affected Environment

The project falls within the Fremont-Kramer Desert Wildlife Management Area (DWMA). DWMAs are to be managed as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern for Desert tortoise conservation, and require implementation of specific controls over uses such as off-highway vehicles, grazing, and commercial activities to ensure that the following goals are achieved:

Goal 1: sufficient habitat to ensure long-term tortoise population viability is provided.
Goal 2: ensures an upward or stationary trend the tortoise population for at least 25 years.
Goal 3: ensures genetic connectivity among tortoise populations, both within the West Mojave Recovery Unit, and between this and other recovery units
Goal 4: ensures tortoise mortality is reduced

Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives

The following actions are common to all alternatives:

- Fence construction near the western wilderness boundary north of the Cuddeback Lake Gunnery Range fence. This fence would stop vehicle users from driving around the backside of the Cuddeback Lake Gunnery Range through wilderness.
- Fences would be composed of wood braces, T-posts, and three to four strands of smooth wire. Resource protection signs will be installed at regular intervals along the fence lines. All vehicle incursions on public land, except for established routes providing access to private property, would be restored by hand crews to line of sight using standard Student Conservation Association (SCA) restoration techniques. The foot print of all fence lines removed from wilderness would also be restored in this way. Broadcast seeding of native species may occur on restoration sites.

These actions would protect wildlife habitat and sensitive species from adverse OHV impacts. Potential OHV impacts include killing vegetation, running over wildlife, decreasing vegetative cover or creating bare ground, crushing animal burrows, loud engine noises that disrupt bird breeding and prevent successful nesting. New fence construction and restoration of old (removed) fence lines funneling vehicles through wilderness would reduce these OHV impacts. During fence construction, stipulations to protect the Desert tortoise need to be followed. (See section on Wildlife and Threatened and Endangered Species)

Wilderness Resource Protection Only Alternative A

Direct and Indirect Impacts. While this alternative would provide for increased protection of Desert tortoise habitat within the wilderness, it could create some additional damage in the DWMA, in the event that OHV users begin to trail the new fence line through virgin habitat. Also, the non-designated routes outside of the fence line would continue to be utilized and therefore could never recover naturally.

Mitigation. None

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

Multiple Resources Protection Alternative B

Direct and Indirect Impacts. This alternative would protect both the wildlife habitat within the wilderness, as well as additional habitat, including a series of parallel washes. Washes are corridors where wildlife species travel and occur in greater numbers than outside of washes. Washes have more vegetation because water concentrates and flows

through them, maintaining a higher level of soil moisture than that in the surrounding desert. This vegetation provides forage for many animal species. Because of the denser vegetation, insects also occur in greater numbers in washes, providing insect prey for wildlife. Numerous animal burrows are present near and west of the wilderness boundary south of the Cuddeback Lake Gunnery Range. Locating the new fences along existing, open, designated routes of travel would protect the wildlife species that use these burrows from being crushed by vehicles traveling off-route to trail new fence lines in the area. Many of these burrows are occupied by various wildlife species. Even unused burrows are important habitat. The abandoned burrows of badger, coyotes and tortoises are often adopted by burrowing owls to use as nesting burrows. Desert tortoises, lizards, snakes, and small mammals enter empty burrows, seeking shelter from the desert sun or protection from predators such as raptors. Alternative B would prevent people for driving up the washes and would encourage people to stay on designated routes. Protecting the wash habitat would prevent habitat fragmentation and would allow wildlife to use contiguous quality habitat.

Mitigation. Protective measures will be included in the Wildlife Section

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

No Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts. The habitat would continue to be degraded at the current rate.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

Air Quality

Affected Environment

The wilderness lies within the Mojave Desert Air Basin. Air quality is generally good. However, at times the area has not met air quality standards due to locally generated and/or transported pollutants. The area is within the San Bernardino County PM10 Planning Area. This is a federal non-attainment area for PM10. PM10 air pollution comes primarily from construction activities in the metropolitan areas to the south.

Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives

Direct and Indirect Impacts. A very small amount of particulate emissions could be generated by construction vehicles accessing the site. Pollutant levels should not exceed current levels. The emissions are clearly deminimus and no further conformity analysis is necessary.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

Wilderness Resource Protection Only Alternative A

Direct and Indirect Impacts. A very small amount of particulate emissions could be generated by construction vehicles accessing the site. Pollutant levels should not exceed current levels. The emissions are clearly deminimus and no further conformity analysis is necessary.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

Multiple Resources Protection Alternative B

Direct and Indirect Impacts. A very small amount of particulate emissions could be generated by construction vehicles accessing the site. Pollutant levels should not exceed current levels. The emissions are clearly deminimus and no further conformity analysis is necessary.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

No Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts. No emissions would be produced.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

Livestock Management

Affected Environment

The north half of the Grass Valley Wilderness is located within the Pilot Knob Allotment. This allotment has not been grazed by cattle or sheep for at least 13 years.
The Pilot Knob Allotment was designated in the Taylor Grazing Act of 1934 as a Section 15 allotment. The allotment was subsequently placed on a lease/rental grazing fee based upon acreage rather than use. In 1971, the Pilot Knob Allotment was classified as a sheep as well as a cattle allotment and BLM reclassified all Section 15 sheep allotments as ephemeral to allow non-use instead of a set fee schedule. However Section 15 regulations did not allow for non-use and required the lessee to pay full fees each year whether grazing took place or not. This policy encouraged overgrazing.

Originally the Pilot Knob Allotment included a portion of the Naval Air Weapons Station (NAWS). In 1982, NAWS stopped grazing on its portion of the allotment. Between 1980 and 1989, the allotment was administered under ephemeral guidelines established in the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan for sheep grazing in crucial and highly crucial tortoise habitat. These guidelines established a higher 350 lbs/acre minimal ephemeral production standard and a more restrictive seasonal tortoise emergence requirement. These guidelines were also used for cattle grazing.

The 2005 West Mojave (WEMO) Plan Amendment to the CDCA Plan identified the Pilot Knob Allotment as one of eight allotments open to voluntary relinquishment. In 1999, The Wildlands Conservancy and the Desert Tortoise Preserve Committee acquired the lease for the allotment. They did not graze the allotment and sent a letter of voluntary relinquishment in April of 2006. BLM is currently working on an environmental assessment to retire the allotment because of several environmental concerns. These concerns are:

1. The land is designated as critical habitat for the Desert tortoise, a federally listed endangered species. As such, it is essential to the recovery plan for the tortoise.
2. The land is part of a larger land area which is designated as a Desert Wildlife Management Area or DWMA. There is no grazing permitted in the DWMA except by plan amendment.
3. The land is designated as part of the Mohave Ground Squirrel Conservation Area for the Mohave Ground Squirrel, a state listed threatened species.
4. Three BLM special status plant species occur within the allotment. They are: the desert cymopterus (*C. deserticola*), the Barstow wooly sunflower (*Eriophyllum mohavense*), and Clokey's cryptantha (*C. clokeyi*).
5. At the time of the Grass Valley Wilderness designation in 1994, the Pilot Knob Allotment was classified as an ephemeral allotment and therefore, had no

established allocation for perennial forage. Wilderness regulations permit grazing to the degree that it existed at the time of designation. It is no longer possible to establish a perennial forage preference on the allotment.

The Pilot Knob Allotment is no longer an active grazing allotment and will not be available for grazing in the future.

Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives

Direct and Indirect Impacts. None.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

Wilderness Resource Protection Only Alternative A

Direct and Indirect Impacts. None.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

Multiple Resources Protection Alternative B

Direct and Indirect Impacts. None.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

No Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts. None.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

Cultural Resources

Affected Environment

Very little cultural resource inventory has been conducted in the Grass Valley Wilderness. These projects have been limited to areas of restoration and reconnaissance for removal of inactive range improvements. Some range improvements, including tanks, troughs, and pipelines, were installed pre-1960 and may be considered cultural resources. Two prehistoric sites were identified during recent reconnaissance of restoration areas, but have not been fully recorded to date. One large site, Blackwater Well, is located at the north boundary of the Wilderness area, with some overlap inside the boundary. This site has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places and is part of an annual monitoring program.

Because limited cultural resource investigations have occurred within the Wilderness area, very little is known about the cultural resource landscape. The Wilderness' proximity to several prominent landscape features, including Pilot Knob, the Black Hills, Granite Mountain, and several unnamed dry lakes suggest that there may be many unknown sites in the region. Any surface disturbing activities within the Wilderness, including those associated with restoration activities will include a full Class III cultural resource inventory. This will allow the BLM to increase our knowledge of the cultural resources in the Wilderness area, as well as to prevent unnecessary impacts to sites that have already sustained damage from unauthorized routes of travel.

Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives

Class III cultural resource inventories have been completed for proposed actions common to all alternatives, including the western wilderness boundary north of Cuddeback Lake Gunnery Range fenced area, the southern boundary fence one mile west of the NAWS boundary, and the removal of the old fence line and associated restoration activities (See Cultural Resource Report CA-650-2012-004).

Direct and Indirect Impacts. Cultural resources were not identified during inventory in the proposed project area for the western wilderness vehicle barriers completed in December 2011 and the southern boundary fence completed in February 2012. The proposed action will have no impact or effect on historic properties eligible or potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Isolated occurrences of cultural material and two newly identified prehistoric cultural resource properties were identified within the project area for the removal of posts and trespass routes along the old fence in the south half of the wilderness area. Areas with cultural material were avoided during ground disturbing activities involved with removal of the fence line, and therefore were not be impacted by the action. The removal of the fence line and targeted restorations will prevent further impacts to the sites by unauthorized off-highway vehicle travel along the fence and unauthorized routes.

Mitigation. Cultural resources identified during inventory of the old fence line corridor will be avoided. Any changes in the new proposed fence lines common to all alternatives will require additional inventory prior to commencing ground disturbing activities.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None

Residual Impacts. The removal of the old fence line and targeted restorations will prevent further impacts to the sites by off-highway vehicle travel along the fence and unauthorized routes.

Wilderness Resource Protection Only Alternative A

Direct and Indirect Impacts. Cultural resource properties were identified during the Class III cultural resource inventory conducted in December 2011 of Alternative A, the proposed wilderness protection fence. The fence will be routed to avoid cultural resources, and will therefore have no impact or effect on cultural resources eligible or potentially eligible for listing on the National Register of Historic Places.

Mitigation. The fence proposed for Alternative A must follow the route designed to avoid cultural resources within the project area. Changes to the route will require additional cultural resource inventory prior to ground disturbance.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None

Residual Impacts. The fence will be routed to avoid cultural resources identified during the Class III inventory of the proposed route.

Multiple Resources Protection Alternative B

Direct and Indirect Impacts. A Class III Cultural Resources inventory was completed for Alternative B, Multiple Resources Protection, in December 2012. Placing the fence along an existing route will provide additional protection to cultural resources located behind fence lines and within the wilderness that have not been impacted by recent human impacts.

Mitigation. The final placement of this proposed fence will include design features and routing intended to avoid cultural resources identified during Class III inventory of the route.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None

Residual Impacts. None

No Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts. Under the no action alternative, cultural resources will not be impacted or affected by the proposed action. Cultural resources not yet identified located within wilderness and unroaded sections of public land may continue to be at risk from unauthorized vehicle incursion.

Mitigation. No mitigation measures will be required.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None

Residual Impacts. None

Recreation

Affected Environment

Recreational activities outside wilderness include vehicle camping, bird hunting, and off-highway vehicle use. The area is extremely popular with bird hunters during quail and chukar season and with dirt bikers and quad riders throughout the cool off-highway vehicle use season from October through April. Small, isolated, dispersed camping areas do exist on public land throughout the area and along the wilderness boundary. Vehicle camping is limited to within 30 feet of the centerline of the open vehicle routes comprising the wilderness boundary and to within 50' of open vehicle routes in the area generally because of the DWMA. Cuddeback Dry Lake is an exception within the DWMA. Most off-road vehicle users in RVs and in large groups camp there, because the access is easy and the camping is unlimited. Some camping also occurs on private lands in the area.

Cuddeback Lake is close (within 4-5 miles) to the Grass Valley Wilderness Area. The open designated routes forming the wilderness boundary and the Grass Valley open vehicle corridor are very popular with off-road vehicle users and others visiting the area. Vehicle use in the area is limited to designated routes and trails only outside of Cuddeback Dry Lake, and the much larger 57,000 acre Spangler Hills Open Area located approximately 20 miles away. Route designation in the Red Mountain Sub-region and Fremont-Kramer DWMA was completed in March 2006 under the West Mojave Plan (WEMO). All vehicle use is prohibited in wilderness.

Starting in 2006, BLM has made a concerted effort to refurbish and maintain informational kiosks in the Red Mountain Subregion and DWMA with updated maps and information about appropriate recreational opportunities in the region. Handouts and maps have been revised to explain differences between Open Areas and surrounding Limited Use, DWMA and Wilderness areas. BLM staff regularly sponsor public outreach days over busy holiday weekends during the active OHV season. Booths are set up in Randsburg, Borax Mines, and along specific busy OHV trails in the area.

Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives

Direct and Indirect Impacts. The proposed fences and restoration sites would have no adverse impacts on legitimate recreational opportunities in the area. No open, designated vehicle routes would be closed by these fences and restoration activities. Fences would be constructed across unroaded areas near the wilderness boundary or outside of the 50' setback for open, designated vehicle routes within the DWMA. Sites would be restored to line of sight behind proposed fence lines or from the berm of the nearest open, designated vehicle route. Visible old fence lines and vehicle trespass routes would be restored before and behind fence lines to erase linear features so that riders are not drawn to follow them and collide with fences and restoration sites. Exceptions would be made for trail head parking where vehicle routes terminate near the wilderness boundary and for established campsites and pullouts in the area within 50' of the centerline of any open vehicle route. These exceptions would provide access to wilderness and would enable vehicle users to still be able to pull off and park alongside open vehicle routes where they have in the past. Pedestrian-equestrian gates would be installed along all fence lines to provide for pedestrian-equestrian access and appropriate public uses of the area.

Significant stretches of the wilderness boundary would remain unfenced and open to appropriate use. The entire northern boundary, the open vehicle corridor through wilderness, and nearly all of the southern boundary would remain unfenced.

The fences and barriers should improve the recreational environment by protecting the full range of recreational opportunities available in the region as provided by the Open Vehicle Use, Limited Vehicle Use/DWMA and Closed to Vehicle Use/Wilderness Area designations.

Mitigation. Open, designated routes should not be blocked short of their terminus near the Grass Valley Wilderness boundary. Where fences are built along section lines, they should be built as close as possible to the wilderness boundary and/or public/private land interface. Where fences are built along open, designated vehicle routes, they should be built outside of the 50' setback from the centerline of the vehicle route as specified by WEMO. All visible vehicle routes trespassing off-route and into wilderness should be restored to line of sight. Vertical mulch, dead Joshua tree limbs or rocks or boulders, and/or certified weed-free sterile rice straw bales may be moved into these trespass sites as part of the restoration effort to visibly block vehicle access, slow erosion, and jumpstart natural recovery. In addition, visible trespass routes crossing boundary fences should be well-signed and marked with red/white reflective tape to warn the motoring public. Signs and reflective tape should be maintained until obvious, visible vehicle trespass routes behind fences and barriers have virtually disappeared.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. There would be no negative residual impacts from the construction of the fences and barriers. Open, designated routes in the area would not be shortened,

closed, or otherwise negatively affected. Legitimate recreational opportunities would not be abridged. Recreational uses of wilderness would be protected, preserved, and enhanced. The quality of recreational opportunities outside of wilderness also would be preserved and enhanced by better visitor compliance and overall improvements in wildlife habitat and scenic values, as illegal vehicle use is curbed and habitat fragmentation and visible vehicle scars are erased.

Wilderness Resource Protection Only Alternative A

Direct and Indirect Impacts. Same as Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives.

Mitigation. Same as Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. Same as Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives.

Multiple Resources Protection Alternative B

Direct and Indirect Impacts. Same as Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives except that some public land outside of wilderness as well as within wilderness would be protected from illegal off-road vehicle use. This would bring more of the Red Mountain Subregion into compliance with WEMO. Vehicle users would be blocked from driving off-route in these additional fenced-off areas and from exceeding new 50' parking and vehicle camping restrictions imposed by WEMO within the DWMA. This would improve and preserve non-motorized recreational opportunities within these unroaded areas.

Mitigation. Same as Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. Same as Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives.

No Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts. Wilderness character and values would continue to decline. The quality of recreational opportunities associated with wilderness would continue to decline. Recreational opportunities other than off-road motor vehicle use in the area would be lost. Wildlife habitat and scenic values would continue to diminish and with it opportunities for quality recreational experiences other than vehicle play, such as vehicle touring, hunting, wildlife and wildflower viewing.

Mitigation. Signing, law enforcement, and public outreach efforts would need to be significantly stepped-up to try to offset the lack of effective vehicle barriers and restoration on closed, visible vehicle routes in the area. It is extremely unlikely that BLM will ever have enough law enforcement and park ranger personnel to change existing negative trends in these areas using these means alone. If BLM were to put existing personnel to work on these areas at effective levels, other highly impacted areas throughout the Ridgecrest Field Office Area would be deprived of staff and would suffer.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. If BLM were to put existing personnel to work on these areas at effective levels, relying on signing, law enforcement and public outreach alone, other highly impacted areas in the Ridgecrest Field Office Area would be deprived of staff and would suffer.

Residual Impacts. Recreational opportunities other than off-road motor vehicle use would be lost. Environmental degradation caused by illegal off-road vehicle use would continue and would increase over time on Limited Use lands within the DWMA and inside designated Wilderness.

Soils

Affected Environment

There are no soil surveys in the project area. Generally the soils in the area are shallow and rocky and susceptible to accelerated erosion from wind and water especially when the surface has been disturbed.

Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives

Direct and Indirect Impacts. The proposed action could impact a small parcel of soil under each new fence post. This impact would be minimal. The project's purpose is to block illegal vehicle traffic into the wilderness. This could reduce the amount of exposed bare ground and potential for wind and water erosion.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

Wilderness Resource Protection Only Alternative A

Direct and Indirect Impacts. Same as Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

Multiple Resources Protection Alternative B

Direct and Indirect Impacts. Same as Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives, except that additional land outside of wilderness would be protected and would benefit from blocking illegal vehicle use. This could reduce the amount of exposed bare ground and potential for wind and water erosion in these areas.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

No Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts. Wind and water erosion would continue at the current rates.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

Vegetation

Affected Environment

Vegetation consists primarily of creosote bush (*Larrea tridentata*) scrub community with Joshua trees (*Yucca brevifolia*) and a variety of spring annuals. Desert needlegrass (*Achnatherum speciosum*) is the dominant grass and gave Grass Valley its name. It grows in dense stands in the eastern portion of the wilderness. Other grass species include varied bluegrass (*Poa segunda*). Needle-and-thread grass (*Hesperostipa comata*), which is considered a Great Basin species from northern regions, occurs sparsely on moister sites. Other perennial species include burro bush (*Ambrosia dumosa*), Cooper's golden bush (*Ericameria cooperi*), cheese bush (*Hymenoclea salsola*), winterfat (*Krascheninnikovia lanata*), goldenhead (*Acamptopappus sphaerocephalus*), saltbush (*Atriplex polycarpa*), turpentine rue (*Thamnosma montana*), spiny hopsage (*Grayia spinosa*), Cooper's thorn bush (*Lycium cooperi*), California buckwheat (*Eriogonum fasciculatum*) and Mormon tea (*Ephedra nevadensis*).

A diverse cover of annual plants is present in years of adequate rainfall. These provide spectacular wildflower displays. Annual species include coreopsis (*Coreopsis bigelovii*),

fiddleneck (*Amsinkia spp*.), Phacelia spp., goldfields (*Lasthenia californica*), desert dandelion (*Malacothrix californica*), and *Gilia spp*. Barstow wooly sunflower (*Eriophyllum mohavense*) and Clokey's Cryptantha (*Cryptantha clokeyi*), which are BLM special status plant species, also occur here.

There are no known noxious plant communities. Nor are there any known natural seeps and springs and riparian areas. Vegetation is affected by visitor use (primarily OHV trespass). Vegetation on all proposed work sites is typical for the area. The work sites do not contain any specialized endemic plants.

Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives

Direct and Indirect Impacts. A very small amount of common vegetation may be trampled and broken by fence construction activities.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

Wilderness Resource Protection Only Alternative A

Direct and Indirect Impacts. The fence would protect native vegetation within the Wilderness boundary.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

Multiple Resources Protection Alternative B

Direct and Indirect Impacts. Alternative B would protect native vegetation within wilderness and in an additional 1440 acres of unroaded public land within the DWMA. This vegetation provides valuable habitat for native wildlife species, including the Desert tortoise and the Mohave ground squirrel. Alternative B would protect vegetation that grows in a series of washes that occur within the proposed fenced area of Alternative B. Vegetation in washes is more abundant and consists of a different array of species than the surrounding drier desert. Wash vegetation is important for insect production that provides important forage for desert bats, birds, and lizards. Protecting this wash vegetation promotes a healthy wildlife population within the fenced area.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.
No Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts. Plant communities and special status species in designated wilderness and in roadless areas within the DWMA would remain vulnerable to damage by illegal, off-route vehicle use. Illegal vehicle routes would continue to proliferate both inside and outside of wilderness within the DWMA, causing direct mortality, fragmentation of plant communities, compaction and dessication of soils, and loss of overall vegetation that provides cover and food for wildlife species.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. Plant communities would continue to suffer losses both inside designated wilderness and outside in roadless areas within the DWMA. Left unchecked, these losses would be expected to increase and accumulate over time.

Residual Impacts. None.

Lands

Affected Environment

There are several private inholdings on patented and subdivided State lands within and outside of the Grass Valley Wilderness. To date, BLM has acquired 1,065 acres or 29% of the total number of estimated acres (3,700) of private and/or State lands located within this wilderness. Outside of wilderness, an unknown quantity of private land has also been acquired.

All proposed fences would be built on public, not private land. BLM Cadastral Survey has been contracted to make sure that all fences are built on public as opposed to private land. Under the Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives, two fences would be built: one near the western wilderness boundary north of the fenced portion of the Cuddeback Lake Gunnery Range and one near or within two miles of the western wilderness boundary south of the Gunnery Range. The fence proposed for the area north of the Gunnery Range fence would terminate short of the private property in Section 16. The proposed fence under either alternative for the area south of the Gunnery Range would also terminate short of private property in Section 16 or 13. (See Map in Appendix C.)

Some private property would end up behind proposed fence lines under Alternative A and B in the area south of the Cuddeback Lake Gunnery Range. Here public land is checker-boarded with private land both inside and outside of wilderness. The proposed action under either alternative provides for the installation of locked gates and across established routes used by property owners for private access to private inholdings. Private holdings in Sections 5, 7, and 9 of T31S, R43E were identified as the holdings most likely to be affected by either one or both of these proposed alternatives.

On January 12, 2012, BLM sent out notices to 83 individuals owning property in Sections 5, 7, and 9. Owners were informed of BLM's proposed action and alternatives. BLM explained that the intent of the proposed fences was to stop illegal vehicle use of public lands and publicly-owned portions of the wilderness. It was not to prevent private property owners from using vehicles to access or otherwise develop their properties. Owners were encouraged to contact BLM with questions or concerns, including requests for additional gates or for combinations to locks placed on gates along fence lines, so private owners could access their private property.

BLM was subsequently contacted by four private property owners in the area. All four expressed support for the proposed fences, because the fences would protect their private property as well as public land from off-road vehicle trespass. The private parcels in these sections have not been developed. The four private property owners who contacted BLM had no plans to develop their lands in the future. Motor vehicle access does not appear to be an issue for property owners at this time. The four property owners were comfortable with the idea of installing locked gates along known vehicle access routes crossing the fence line. They felt these could be used to access their properties and understood more gates could be installed as needed in the future.

One old telephone ROW exists in Section 6. It crosses public land and terminates at the Cuddeback Lake Gunnery Range. Developments associated with this ROW have been removed and the ROW is due to expire soon. A locked gate will be installed at both ends of this ROW should the owner (Verizon) require access.

Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives

Direct and Indirect Impacts. None. The proposed actions common to all alternatives would occur in areas located well away from private property. This includes one of two new proposed fences. The fence extending the existing Cuddeback Lake Gunnery Range fence north near the western wilderness boundary is more than a ¼ mile from any private property and will stop well short of the nearest private parcel in Section 16. This fence will not impede access to any private parcel inside or outside of wilderness. The restoration of vehicle trespass routes behind fence lines should have no effect on private property owners in the area, if established routes accessing private property are left unrestored behind locked gates. The restoration of the 7 miles of old range fence line west of the Grass Valley vehicle corridor would not affect private property owners in the area.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

Wilderness Resource Protection Only Alternative A

Direct and Indirect Impacts. Private parcels located in T. 31, R. 43 E., Section 9 could be affected by the proposed southern extension of the Cuddeback Lake Gunnery Range fence near the western boundary of the Grass Valley Wilderness. As no fences would be built across private land, these impacts would be indirect, rather than direct, and would be tied to blocking public access and use of these properties, and perhaps, if not handled properly, interfering with legitimate private owner access and use of these properties. BLM is proposing to install locked gates along the proposed fence line at all obvious vehicle entry points to these properties near the western wilderness boundary. Property owners have been contacted and have been asked to contact the BLM Ridgecrest Field Office for the combination to these gates or to request additional gates if the gates depicted on the maps in Appendix A are insufficient, or to raise any other concerns. Note that access to private parcels in Section 9 from the southern wilderness boundary will remain unimpeded by any physical structures.

Alternative A would provide a vehicle barrier and protection from off-road vehicle trespass to all lands within Section 9, be they public or private. However, it could increase vehicle trespass on public and private lands located in adjacent sections 5 and 7 as vehicle users would continue to cut across, trail, and return from new fence lines blocking their access and use across the wilderness boundary.

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Mitigation. Follow BLM Cadastral Survey recommendations per IM 2011-122 for locating fences on public lands near the wilderness boundary.

Follow proper procedures and regulations for notifying potentially affected parties on proposed actions on BLM lands and resolving any issues or concerns.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

Multiple Resources Protection Alternative B

Direct and Indirect Impacts. Private parcels located in Sections 5 and 7 as well as in Section 9 could be affected by the proposed fence extending out from the wilderness boundary to encompass more land south of the Gunnery Range. As no fences would be built across private land, these impacts would be indirect, rather than direct, and would be tied to blocking public access and use of these properties, and perhaps, if not handled properly, interfering with legitimate private owner access and use of these properties. BLM will install locked gates along the proposed fence line at all obvious vehicle entry points to these properties. Property owners have been contacted and have been asked to contact BLM for the combination to these gates or to request additional gates as needed,

or to raise any other concerns. Note that access to private parcels in Section 9 from the southern wilderness boundary will remain unimpeded by any physical structures.

Alternative B would provide a vehicle barrier and protection from off-road vehicle trespass to public and private lands located in Sections 5, 6, 7 and 8, as well as in Section 9. Installing fences on the periphery of these areas would stop vehicle trespass into these areas. Installing fences close and parallel to open vehicle routes would discourage vehicle users from trailing along fence lines and creating additional trespass routes on private as well as public lands.

Mitigation. Same as Alternative A.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

No Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts. Illegal off-road vehicle use would continue on private as well as public lands in the area and would be likely to increase over time.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

Wastes and Hazardous Materials

Affected Environment

The Formerly Used Defense Site (FUDS) also known as George Air Force Base/ Nellis Air Force Base Air to Ground Gunnery Range (AGGR) and Cuddeback Gunnery Range is adjacent to the Grass Valley Wilderness west of the proposed project area. This FUDS is undergoing remediation to return the withdrawn area to a condition as close to its pre military use as possible. The remediation process will go through several phases within the withdrawal boundary prior to being returned to BLM. Due to the nature of the withdrawal and its use as and AGGR during WWII, it is possible that not all of the practice armament fell within the military withdrawn lands.

Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives

The proposed fences may help protect the public from inadvertently setting off explosives not yet detonated and/or removed by driving over the area.

Direct and Indirect Impacts. It is unlikely that the installation of a perimeter fence along the wilderness boundary will have a direct impact to the ongoing remediation program of the FUDS Nellis AGGR. A possible indirect impact to the remediation activities at Nellis AGGR may occur if practice armament is uncovered during the installation process of the fence and the Proposed Action is delayed until the Air Force could supply a team to remove the device.

Mitigation. If an Unexploded Ordinance (UXO) is discovered during the installation of the fence, stop work and report the location of the UXO to the BLM RFO Hazmat Program Manager and the Realty Specialist.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. No residual impacts are anticipated with the Proposed Action.

Wilderness Resource Protection Only Alternative A

Direct and Indirect Impacts. The proposed fences may help protect the public from inadvertently setting off explosives not yet detonated and/or removed by driving over the area.

Otherwise, there will be no impacts. If vehicle access to wilderness and adjoining areas is needed for clean-up activities in the future, military contractors would still be able to access these areas through one or more of the locked gates that will be installed along the proposed fence lines. In addition, the military may install a locked gate of their own along the east side of the current Cuddeback Lake Gunnery Range fenced exclosure.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

Multiple Resources Protection Alternative B

Direct and Indirect Impacts. Same as Alternative A. For same reasons described above.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

No Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts. The public would lose some protection offered by the fences which will stop vehicle use in these areas.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

Visual Resources

Affected Environment

Visual Resource Management (VRM) Classes are typically established during the land use planning process following a visual resource inventory. In April of 2012, VRM classes were established throughout the Ridgecrest Field Office area in anticipation of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP).

The project area falls within VRM Class 1 and VRM Class III lands. All wilderness areas are automatically classified as being in VRM Class 1. The stated objective of this class rating is "to preserve the existing character of the landscape." Consequently, "the level of change to the characteristic landscape should be very low and must not attract attention." BLM is proposing to build protective fences outside of wilderness and to restore trespass routes and old fence lines behind new fence lines to jumpstart recovery and re-vegetation in these areas. The action is being proposed to preserve and enhance the visual integrity of the wilderness, to return it to a more natural and pristine (wild) wilderness condition.

Two new fences would be built outside but near the wilderness boundary to protect restoration sites and to stop illegal vehicle use of the wilderness area and adjacent roadless areas within the DWMA. These fences would be built on VRM Class III lands where fences currently already exist. The objective of a VRM Class III rating is to "partially retain the existing character of the landscape." The level of change should be moderate. "Management activities may attract attention but should not dominate the view of the casual observer." The fences would extend an existing Cuddeback Lake Gunnery Range fence first to the north and then to the south and west. Under Alternative A, the second fence would be built on undeveloped land near the wilderness boundary. Under Alternative B, the second fence would be built 1 ½-2 miles west of the wilderness boundary within sight of the nearest available open designated vehicle route. This fence would serve to protect not just wilderness, but additional lands within the DWMA from illegal (off-route) vehicle use.

The Grass Valley Wilderness encompasses two small uplifted areas, providing color, contrast and topographical relief from the surrounding desert floor. While visual values in the Grass Valley Wilderness are compromised by chronic illegal off-road vehicle use, this use is largely confined now to the western half of the wilderness, specifically along the western boundary and along an old east-west fence line west of the open vehicle corridor through wilderness. After last year's successful SCA restoration work, the eastern half of the wilderness appears relatively untouched by such activity and is much more natural and pristine.

The Red Mountain Subregion juxtaposes Wilderness Class I lands with lightly to moderately-impacted Class III lands within a DWMA (ACEC) and much more heavily-impacted VRM Class III lands surrounding the Cuddeback Lake dry lakebed, a de facto open area. The Cuddeback Lake Gunnery Range has not been given a VRM Class rating, but includes both heavily-disturbed lands within the fenced exclosure bordering wilderness and more pristine lands north of the exclosure. Land ownership is checker-boarded between private and public sections throughout the area. While most of the land remains undeveloped, there are some private parcels with debris and structures. Most of these structures have been abandoned and vandalized. Spillover from Cuddeback Lake, a popular RV camping and OHV-staging area has had ripple effects throughout the area, including the Grass Valley Wilderness. Vehicle users approach and exit the lake bed in multiple directions. While many riders stay on designated routes and out of wilderness, many frequently do not. This is a problem, particularly in washes and along fence lines which riders frequently follow off-route and into wilderness, creating multiple entry and exit points and additional tracks that crisscross the area. All of this activity contributes to the moderately to heavily-degraded aspect of much of the land, especially where it is in close proximity to the lake bed.

Visual values improve with distance from the lake bed, particularly as one travels east. The private and public lands in Sections 5, 6, 7 and 8 which would be protected by a fence under Alternative B are undeveloped. They are undisturbed except for the illegal vehicle routes coursing through the area.

Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives

Direct and Indirect Impacts. Two new fences have been proposed for construction outside but near the western Grass Valley Wilderness boundary. These fences would extend an existing fence around the most impacted portion of the Cuddeback Lake Gunnery Range to the north and to the south and west. These fences would easily meet VRM Class III criteria. The change to the landscape would be low (it would not exceed moderate) and would attract attention but would not dominate the view of the casual observer. The fences would be simple fences, similar to range and military fences already present in the area. Fences would be comprised of smooth wire and iron T-posts with occasional wooden braces at major pivot points. They would follow the contours of the land, undulating with the terrain. They would be set back at least 50' from any open, designated vehicle route. And, the fences would be well-screened by surrounding vegetation, i.e., by large creosote shrubs. The fences would introduce two new linear

manmade features into the landscape. However, these features would be located outside of designated wilderness and under Alternative B, outside of undeveloped land, and would be more than offset by the successful restoration and elimination of more centrally located and extensive old fence lines and vehicle trespass routes. In this way, these peripheral fences would not only "partially retain" the existing character of the landscape, they would actually help "preserve" it in all areas behind the fence lines, in and outside of wilderness.

An adequate vehicle barrier is needed for the restoration of old fence lines and vehicle trespass routes inside and outside of wilderness to be successful. The vehicle barriers must be extensive enough to discourage vehicle users from simply driving around barriers and through or around restoration sites. The proposed fences are visually low key, in keeping with other fences found throughout the area, but extensive enough to be effective.

Mitigation. Fences should be kept to the minimum necessary to effectively block vehicle traffic and should be used in conjunction with existing fences and natural obstacles whenever possible. T-posts should be kept low to the ground and should be painted green to blend-in with the surrounding vegetation. Vegetation along fence lines should be crushed, rather than removed. Fence lines should be marked with reflective tape only where visible routes behind fence lines cannot be camouflaged by restoration well enough to avoid accidental collisions.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None. Barriers and fences could be removed when the area has fully recovered (trespass routes have revegetated) and when vehicle trespass is no longer a problem.

Residual Impacts. VRM Class I and III standards would be met. Restoration sites within wilderness would remain undisturbed and would be allowed to recover. The visual integrity and naturalness of the wilderness area would be restored. Adjacent lands protected by fence lines would be protected from off-route vehicle travel. These areas would also remain undisturbed long enough to recover.

<u>Wilderness Resource Protection Only Alternative A</u>

Direct and Indirect Impacts. A third fence extending south from the Cuddeback Lake Gunnery Range fence would be built near the western wilderness boundary. This fence would introduce yet another manmade feature near the Wilderness/Limited Use/DWMA interface. However, this fence and its northern counterpart would be consistent with fencing already present in the area. It would follow the contours of the land and it would be screened by vegetation. It would easily meet VRM Class III criteria.

The third fence would work in conjunction with the northern proposed fence and the existing Gunnery Range fence to protect the western half of the Grass Valley Wilderness from further vehicle intrusions. Critically, it would block vehicle users from running the old range fence line from west to east across the middle and entire width of the western

half of the wilderness area. It would stop vehicle trespass long enough for restoration sites to recover and visible trespass routes to disappear. Recovery of these sites would remove visible traces of chronic vehicle use from wilderness. This would restore visual integrity to the wilderness area, the most highly valued visual resource in the area.

However, a new fence located near the wilderness boundary south of the Cuddeback Lake Gunnery Range, could have negative visual impacts on adjacent lands located outside of wilderness. The fence line could cause new vehicle trespass routes to proliferate along the new fence line. Vehicle users blocked from driving through wilderness would be likely to follow the new fence line and to create additional access and exit routes along the fence line. This would increase the number of illegal vehicle routes crisscrossing the area. A sharp uptake in the number of illegal vehicle routes would compromise this area's visual integrity. Given that off-route vehicle travel is already a significant problem south of the Gunnery Range and that off-road vehicle users here have a propensity for running fence lines, it would be reasonable to assume that this would be an indirect effect of building the fence line near this section of the wilderness boundary.

Mitigation. Same as the Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None. See Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives.

Residual Impacts. VRM Class I standards would be met inside of wilderness. Areas protected from vehicle trespass by the fence line would recover. Traces of past vehicle use would disappear. The naturalness and visual integrity of the wilderness would be restored.

VRM Class III standards would not be exceeded by the fence line itself, but additional visual impacts would be expected to occur and to accumulate over time west of the fence line. Areas left immediately outside and unprotected by the new fence line would bear the brunt of off-route vehicle use stopped by the fence line. These areas may actually see a decline in visual values as they become riddled by new vehicle tracks. Eventually, these areas may require additional vehicle barriers and restoration efforts.

Multiple Resources Protection Alternative B

Direct and Indirect Impacts. This alternative would work in conjunction with the other proposed fences to block vehicle trespass off-route and across the western wilderness boundary. Impacts would be acceptable under VRM Class I or III criteria for all the reasons described previously. The level of acceptable change would be very low inside wilderness and low to moderate outside of wilderness. A fence built out from the wilderness boundary would improve visual resources both inside and outside of wilderness. The fence would enclose and thus protect a much larger unroaded area spanning both sides of the wilderness boundary. More illegal routes behind the fence line would be closed to vehicles and these routes would have an opportunity over time to

recover on their own. As the new fence would be located very near and parallel to open designated vehicle routes in the area, it would be less likely to siphon vehicle users off of the designated route system to trail new fence lines in the area.

Alternative B would improve and enhance visual as well as biological resources in an important and sensitive area (the DWMA) adjacent to wilderness.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

No Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts. Visual quality of the area would continue to decline as a result of illegal vehicle uses both off-route and inside wilderness. Current trespass routes through restoration sites would continue. These restoration sites would not recover and would not disappear. New illegal trespass routes would proliferate.

Mitigation. (See Recreation Section.) Wilderness boundary signing, law enforcement and public outreach efforts would need to be expanded well beyond the current capacity of the BLM Ridgecrest Field Office.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. Other highly impacted areas throughout the Ridgecrest Field Office Area would suffer as additional staff and more staff time and energy would need to be consumed by this one area alone.

Residual Impacts. Visual resources in Limited Use and Wilderness areas would decline. Over time, these areas may become largely indistinguishable from the neighboring Cuddeback Dry Lake and Spangler Hills Open Vehicle Use Areas.

Wilderness

Affected Environment

The 30,121 acre Grass Valley Wilderness was designated in 1994 by the California Desert Protection Act. It encompasses several low to mid-elevation hills and two-thirds of a large grassy valley extending east onto the China Lake Naval Air Weapons Station. The area is comprised of many extrusive volcanic features. A series of scattered rhyolite hills, reddish-brown to yellow in appearance lie to the west. These hills drain by several small washes into Cuddeback Lake. The area to the east is more uplifted. The hills here are made of basalt with a few distinctive cones. The highest of these features rise no more than 600' above the valley floor.

The Grass Valley Wilderness lies entirely within the Desert tortoise DWMA and within a Mohave Ground Squirrel Conservation Area. As the least-developed and most protected area within the DWMA and Conservation Area, it is invaluable to wildlife (See Biology Section). The wilderness provides exceptional creosote-scrub habitat. The creosote bushes are very large here, often ranging up to 8 feet tall. Joshua trees are also present, as is Desert needle grass, the dominant grass that gave the area its name. Other grass species include varied bluegrass and Needle-and-thread grass, a grass normally found much further north. In general, the area supports an eclectic mix of Mojave Desert and Great Basin shrub species from saltbush, burro bush, cheesebush, Coopers thorn bush and turpentine rue, to winterfat, spiny hopsage, California buckwheat and Mormon tea. In good years of ample rainfall, this area will explode into color. Annuals will carpet the desert floor, extending color in all directions as far as the eye can see. These wildflowers commonly include yellow coreopsis, desert dandelion, and goldfields, as well as purple phacelia and lavender Mojave aster, all favorite food species of the Desert tortoise.

The wilderness is popular with bird hunters, picnickers, and wildflower viewers. Opportunities for solitude and for primitive and unconfined recreation are excellent, particularly outside of the active OHV-use season (cool season months from October to May). Most of the area gets very little use, with most use occurring in areas near open vehicle routes. Few people venture very far from their vehicles to hike deep into the interior. What hiking there is, is all cross-country by necessity and is self-directed. Destinations include the top of the hills both west and east of the corridor which provide spectacular 360-degree views of the surrounding area. Another good place to hike is the valley that gives this wilderness its name. It is surrounded on three sides by several low to mid-elevation hills to the west and south, and by undeveloped NAWS lands extending east. The valley is isolated, very pristine, unusually grassy, and noticeably cooler and wetter than most of the surrounding area.

In 2011, the Ridgecrest Field Office completed the first of what will be many wilderness character monitoring reports for this area. The Grass Valley Wilderness scored best on measures reflecting untrammeledness, i.e., the lack of interference or manipulation by man. It also scored well on opportunities for solitude and for primitive and unconfined recreation. Very few people step away from their vehicles long enough to explore the interior of this wilderness. When they do, they have it to themselves, and they are truly on their own. There are no developed foot or equestrian trails in the area.

The wilderness scored worse on measures of naturalness. This in part was due to the large number of old range developments, pipelines, tanks and troughs, and many miles of old range fence found throughout the area. Many of these developments, including more than 8 miles of old range fence, were removed by last year's SCA crews. These actions more than halved the score for pre-existing manmade developments found in the area, dropping the score from 42 to 20. A reduction in this score reflects a corresponding increase in naturalness.

Naturalness has been and continues to be adversely affected by vehicle trespass. Vehicle trespass has resulted in significantly higher numbers and worse scores, both for the

frequency of illegal vehicle use and for the number of miles over which that vehicle use is occurring.

Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives

Direct and Indirect Impacts. Wilderness values of naturalness, solitude, primitive and unconfined recreation, scenic and ecological values would be improved, protected, and preserved by the proposed actions common to all alternatives.

Naturalness would be improved, protected and preserved by the construction of fences outside but near the western wilderness boundary to stop vehicle trespass into wilderness and by the successful restoration and full recovery of vehicle trespass routes both within and immediately adjacent to wilderness. This would be reflected in lower numbers and improved scores for the amount of illegal, non-authorized vehicle use occurring within wilderness and the number miles over which that illegal vehicle use is occurring. Although no one expects all illegal vehicle use to stop immediately as a result of these actions, it should curb use dramatically, as it becomes more difficult and more obviously illegal to drive into wilderness. In the 2011 Wilderness Character Monitoring Report, the score for frequency of illegal vehicle use was 9, the highest score possible. The fences coupled with restoration performed last year and proposed for this year should drop the score down to 4 immediately and eventually to a 1. In other words, the area would be expected to transition from an area that receives more than one trespass per month in six or more locations, to an area that receives trespass 3 times a year to once a month in three to five locations, to an area that receives a trespass once or twice a year in only one or two locations. The score for miles of active vehicle trespass routes also should drop dramatically from a high of 45 to much less than half that amount immediately, and to significantly less over time. Or to put it more concretely, from more than 34 miles within wilderness being ridden sometime within a given year to less than 15 miles being ridden, and eventually on down to 5 miles or less.

The fences would be installed outside wilderness near the wilderness boundary and would not impair wilderness values in any significant, direct way beyond the period of time required to construct them. Work would be performed by Student Conservation Association crews during the active OHV-use season from October through mid-May. During the construction period, the presence of work crews and the use of vehicles and motorized equipment outside but near the wilderness boundary could negatively impact wilderness values. A wilderness user's sense of solitude and of primitive and unconfined recreation could be impacted by the sights and sounds of the project. However, these impacts would be localized within a ½ mile (immediate sight and sound range) of the project. They may not be any more disturbing than what is currently experienced by most wilderness users near these locations over a busy weekend as a result of chronic, illegal vehicle use of the area. Not all sites would be actively worked on at the same time. Crews would complete work in one location before moving on to the next. It is anticipated that the first (northernmost) of the two proposed fences could take up to 3 weeks to complete; the second up to 3 months, depending upon the alternative selected. Construction disturbances would not follow the wilderness user deeper into the interior of

the wilderness area. Opportunities to escape impacts of fence construction activities would remain available at other locations along the wilderness boundary and within wilderness. In any case, these impacts would be temporary and would cease with completion of the work project.

Indirectly, the proximity of the fence lines to wilderness could negatively impact the user's overall perception of the naturalness of the area and the availability of primitive and unconfined recreation in the adjacent wilderness area. However, these potential adverse effects would be minimal and would be more than offset by pedestrian-equestrian step-overs and the effective stoppage of most if not all of the vehicle traffic inside wilderness. Stopping vehicle traffic would result in a marked increase in the area's overall naturalness (tracklessness) and scenic and ecological values (continuous, unscarred and unbroken expanses and habitat).

Mitigation. All work will be performed as described. Fences will be constructed of wood braces, T-posts, and four strands of smooth wire. Fence posts will be painted green and will be kept as inconspicuous and low to the ground as possible. Vegetation will be crushed rather than removed. All cadastral, cultural, and biological stipulations for fence construction will be followed, including specific instructions regarding fence location and wire spacing.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None. Fences could be removed when vehicle trespass has stopped, restoration sites have recovered, and visible traces of old vehicle routes have disappeared from the wilderness area.

Residual Impacts. There would be no negative residual impacts from fence construction and restoration activities. New resource protection fences would remain in place for as long as they are needed to stop vehicle trespass into wilderness. Restoration sites protected behind fence lines would recover. Vehicle traces would be removed from wilderness. The new resource protection fences would be more than offset by the decommissioning and successful eradication of more than 7 miles of old fence line responsible for directing vehicle traffic nearly all the way through wilderness. The area would be returned to a more natural, wilderness condition.

Wilderness Resource Protection Only Alternative A

Direct and Indirect Impacts. Same as described previously. A fence south of the Cuddeback Gunnery Range must be constructed for all other fences and restoration activities to work together to effectively stop vehicle use inside wilderness and allow the area to recover.

Mitigation. Same as described previously.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None, for reasons described previously.

Residual Impacts. No negative residual impacts for reasons described previously.

Multiple Resources Protection Alternative B

Direct and Indirect Impacts. Same as described previously. The second fence must be constructed for other fences and proposed actions to work effectively to stop vehicle use and allow affected areas to recover. This alternative would protect both wilderness and adjacent sections of unroaded public lands within the DWMA from illegal (wilderness trespass and off-route) vehicle use.

Mitigation. Same as described previously.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None, for reasons described previously.

Residual Impacts. No negative residual impacts for reasons described previously.

No Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts. The proposed fences would not be built. Vehicles would continue to trespass off of the open designated route network and into wilderness on a frequent and recurring basis. The wilderness character of the Grass Valley Wilderness would continue to be undermined and compromised by the presence and impact of off-road vehicle users and use inside wilderness. Restoration efforts would not succeed. Restoration sites would not recover. Illegal vehicle entry points into wilderness and the illegal vehicle trespass network they access would not be laid to rest. Temporary and permanent road traces would remain inside of the wilderness area. Unchecked, vehicle use of the wilderness area could increase over time and trespass routes could proliferate. Wilderness objectives would not be met. Wilderness character scores would not improve and could become worse over time. Higher (worse) scores for naturalness with respect to frequency of vehicle use and number of miles of wilderness impacted by vehicle use could begin impacting scores for other measures as well. For example, opportunities for solitude and a quality primitive and unconfined recreational experience are also diminished by the frequent presence of off-road vehicle users and by persistent traces of off-road vehicle use (fresh tracks and unrestored vehicle routes) within wilderness.

Mitigation. (See Recreation Section.) Wilderness boundary signing, law enforcement and public outreach efforts would need to be expanded well beyond the current capacity of the BLM Ridgecrest Field Office.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. Other highly impacted areas throughout the Ridgecrest Field Office Area would suffer as additional staff and more staff time and energy would need to be consumed by this one area alone.

Residual Impacts. Illegal motor vehicle use and its associated impacts to the wilderness environment would continue to degrade the wilderness resource, the naturalness and

untrammeledness of the land, and its associated cultural resources and wildlife habitat. Wilderness opportunities for solitude and for primitive and unconfined recreation would continue to decline in quality and availability. Over time, motor vehicle use would shrink the wilderness resource within wilderness and would eliminate the opportunity for a true wilderness recreational experience from the wilderness environment in all but the most remote and inaccessible locations.

Wildlife and Threatened and Endangered Species

Affected Environment

The area is within the Fremont-Kramer Desert Tortoise Wildlife Management Area (DWMA), which is also critical habitat for the federally threatened Desert tortoise. Critical habitat provides the necessary habitat components for survival, such as optimal forage, cover, reproduction sites, and protection from disturbance. Therefore, precautions need to be taken to avoid harm to Desert tortoises and avoid disturbance to its habitat. Protective stipulations must be followed. The area is also within the designated Mojave Ground Squirrel Conservation Area. This project would not affect these species provided certain fencing techniques are followed. Additionally, LeConte's thrashers, burrowing owls and American badgers, occur in the area.

Wilderness Resource Protection Only Alternative A

Direct and Indirect Impacts. This alternative should not have direct impacts on tortoises from the construction of the fence itself, if workers watch closely for their presence, especially while traveling to the work site. Direct and indirect impacts could occur, though, if OHV users create a new route along this new fence line. This has happened numerous times in the past in other limited use areas.

Mitigation. Stipulations to protect the Desert tortoise need to be followed. Applicable stipulations include the following precautions: The crew needs to be made aware that tortoises inhabit the area. Project-related vehicles may not exceed 20 miles per hour. The work crew needs to be actively looking for tortoises along the roads to prevent hitting them. Workers need to inspect under their vehicles before moving them. Tortoises are not to be handled or disturbed in any way. (Appendix B)

The additional stipulation to protect wildlife below need to be adhered to:

1. Fence specific

a. All fences would be comprised of 4 strands of smooth wire following BLM standards for wire placement in wildlife habitat. Specifically, the bottom, smooth wire would be at least 16" above ground level and the spacing between the uppermost two wires would be at least 12" to accommodate leaping deer.

b. Post holes should not be left open over night or for the weekend.

c. When constructing the fence, wildlife burrows (small and large) should be avoided.

2. Nesting Birds

a. Work should take place outside of the breeding season (Spring), if possible.

b. Birds' nests should be avoided. Shrubs with nests in them should not be severely trimmed back. If work takes place during breeding season and an active nest is found, the BLM should be notified.

c. No vegetation should be removed along the fence lines; vegetation may be crushed, cut back, or trimmed, but entire plants should not be removed.

d. To the extent possible, previously disturbed areas within the project site shall be utilized for the stockpiling equipment and parking of vehicles.

3. Desert Tortoise

a. All workers engaged in activities at the project site will be educated about the Desert tortoise, including habitat, activity patterns, and avoidance measures.
b. Tortoise burrows will be flagged and avoided.
c. No Desert tortoises can be handled at any time. If a Desert tortoise is found on-site, all activity that may harm or kill the Desert tortoise must cease until the Desert tortoise leaves on its own accord.
d. Avoidance measures would include only using established roads, walking on trails when possible, and avoiding walking on burrows. All nonessential vehicles must remain on existing roads and any ground disturbance must be kept to a minimum.
e. When traveling on designated routes, a 20 mph will be enforced and drivers will exercise care to observe and avoid Desert tortoise.
f. Personnel must check under their vehicles prior to moving them. If there is a Desert tortoise under a vehicle, the vehicle must not be moved until the Desert tortoise leaves on its own accord.
g. No pets (dogs, etc.) will be allowed at the project site.
h. All trash and food items shall be promptly contained within closed, raven-proof containers

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. There would be no negative residual impacts on wildlife caused by construction of the fences and barriers.

Multiple Resources Protection Alternative B

Direct and Indirect Impacts. None. This alternative would have the least likelihood of direct and indirect negative impact on wildlife and its habitat. In addition, this alternative could provide the most benefit to sensitive species in the area. Eliminating illegal OHV traffic from the area would be beneficial to the tortoise, Mohave ground squirrel, and other wildlife. They would benefit from protection of habitat, reduced noise, and human disturbance. The LeConte's thrasher and other bird species would also benefit through

protecting vegetation from OHV damage. The quality of wildlife habitat will be improved by barricading the area from illegal OHV trespass.

The Draft Revised Recovery Plan for the Mojave Population of the Desert Tortoise (USFWS 2008) includes Recovery Actions for the tortoise within critical and non-critical habitat. Recovery Action 2: Protect Existing Populations and Habitat through signing and fencing boundaries of sensitive or impacted areas. This recovery action also mentions fencing roads which has for the most part been successful in decreasing habitat degradation.

Mitigation. Same as Alternative A

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. None.

No Action

Direct and Indirect Impacts. There would be no direct impacts from the No Action. There would continue to be indirect impacts from motorized human-related activity on tortoises and other wildlife. Burrows of tortoises and Mohave ground squirrels would continue to be crushed. Tortoises may be killed or injured by vehicles. Nesting birds would be disturbed by the noise and motion of vehicles driving past. Vegetation would be damaged and crushed, decreasing cover and forage essential for survival of the tortoise. This "Critical Habitat" was designated by the US Fish and Wildlife Service and is considered essential to the conservation of the tortoise. The habitat must provide the necessary habitat components for survival, such as optimal forage, cover, reproduction sites, and protection from disturbance. The No Action Alternative does not protect this critical habitat from damage by off-route vehicles. The soil disturbance, damage to vegetation, and crushing of burrows leads to decreased forage, cover, and reproduction sites.

Mitigation. None.

Irreversible and Irretrievable Commitment of Resources. None.

Residual Impacts. The continuation of trespass motorized activity into the wilderness would continue to provide a range of threats to the Desert tortoise, in the form of crushing, collection, providing a corridor for the spread of invasive weeds, shooting of tortoises, and other activities impacting tortoises.

RECOMMENDED MITIGATION MEASURES

Mitigation measures proposed by specialists have been incorporated into the Operational Parameters.

CHAPTER 4
CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives

Overall, impacts to the area would be positive. The wilderness area would be brought into conformance with the Wilderness Act of 1964 and the California Desert Protection Act of 1994. Illegal vehicle intrusions into wilderness would be halted. Wilderness values (naturalness, solitude, opportunities for primitive and unconfined recreation) would be preserved, protected, and improved. Valuable wildlife habitat and sensitive cultural sites within wilderness would also be better protected and preserved. Restoration efforts would be more likely to succeed behind new fence lines designed to work effectively together as hard vehicle barriers. As traces of illegal vehicle use fade and disappear, vehicle compliance with the Wilderness Act should improve, as will visual resources within wilderness. The Grass Valley Wilderness would be restored to a more scenic, natural, and untrammeled (wild) condition.

Impacts to air quality, soil, and vegetation would be negligible under this and all other alternatives.

Wilderness Resource Protection Only Alternative A

Same as the Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives. However, this alternative may not be viable if cultural resources spanning the wilderness boundary require the fence to be built so far west of the boundary to avoid cultural sites that the fence would need to be built on private, not public land. The archeologist and biologists prefer that the fence be built out from the wilderness boundary on public land sections closer to existing open vehicle routes anyway as proposed under Alternative B. This would stop vehicle trespass in the immediately adjacent area as well as inside wilderness. It would also avoid additional OHV impacts to the area outside of the fence line caused by vehicles trailing new fence lines through the area.

Multiple Resources Protection Alternative B

Same as the Proposed Action Common to All Alternatives, except that some unroaded areas outside as well as inside wilderness would also be protected by fence lines from chronic, illegal (off-route) vehicle use. These areas comprise four checker-boarded public and private land sections that contain valuable cultural and biological resources. Additional OHV trailing impacts caused by fence lines across these areas would be avoided under this alternative. The protection of such areas within a Desert tortoise DWMA is consistent with ACEC and WEMO direction and the Draft Revised Recovery Plan for the tortoise in designated critical habitat.

Visual resources in Class III as well as Class I lands and recreational opportunities both in and outside of wilderness for activities not related to vehicle use would also be protected, preserved, and enhanced under this alternative.

No Action

Fences would not be built. Vehicles would continue to trespass into wilderness and across unroaded sections of adjacent public land on a reoccurring and frequent basis. Wilderness character and values would continue to decline as a result of this illegal vehicle use. Restoration efforts would not succeed. Restoration sites would not recover. Illegal vehicle entry points into wilderness and the illegal vehicle trespass network they access would not be laid to rest. Temporary and permanent road traces would remain inside wilderness. Unchecked, vehicle use of the wilderness area and adjoining unroaded areas would increase over time and trespass routes would proliferate. Naturalness, untrammeledness (wildness), and wilderness values of solitude and opportunity for a more primitive and unconfined type of recreation, would suffer losses due to the persistent traces of man-made features (permanent vehicle routes and vehicle tracks) and frequent presence of off-road vehicle users inside wilderness. Wilderness objectives would not be met and wilderness character scores could worsen. Cultural sites and critical habitat within the Desert tortoise ACEC/DWMA would continue to be degraded and fragmented by unauthorized vehicle use off of the open designated vehicle route system.

CHAPTER 5
PERSONS, GROUPS, AND AGENCIES CONSULTED

A Notice of Proposed Action (NOPA) was sent out to interested members of the public on February 18, 2009. On-going NEPA actions are also posted on the Ridgecrest BLM web site. The public can request a copy of any signed EA. The public has another 30 days from the date of the signed FONSI to comment on the proposed action.

List of Preparers

BLM staff specialists who determined the affected resources for this document are listed in Appendix A. Those who contributed further analysis in the body of this EA are listed below.

Table 5.1 List of Preparers

BLM Preparers

Name	Title	Responsible for the Following Section(s) of this Document
Craig Beck	Recreation Branch Chief	Supervision and support.
Martha Dickes	Outdoor Recreation Planner/Wilderness Specialist	Proposed Action. Impact analysis for recreation, visual resources, lands/realty and wilderness.
Ashley Blythe	Archeologist	Impact analysis for cultural resources.
Glenn Harris	Natural Resources Specialist	Impact analysis for air quality, soils, and vegetation.
Sam Fitton	Range Conservationist	Impact analysis for range/livestock grazing.
Shelly Ellis Carrie Woods	Wildlife Biologists	Impact analysis for wildlife and threatened and endangered species.
Lori Ford	Hazmat Specialist and NEPA Coordinator	Impact analysis for wastes and hazardous materials.

APPENDIX A
INTERDISCIPLINARY TEAM ANALYSIS RECORD CHECKLIST

Critical Element	Affected	Date----Initials
Air Resources	***YES***	1/23/13 L Ford
ACECs	***YES***	1/22/13 S Ellis
Cultural Resources	*NO*	1/23/13 A. Blythe
Farmlands, Prime/Unique	*NO*	1/28/13 L Ford
Floodplain management	*NO*	1/28/13 L Ford
Nat. Amer Rel Concerns	*NO*	1/23/13 A. Blythe
T&E Wildlife	*NO*	1/22/13 S Ellis
T&E Vegetation,	*NO*	1/22/13 S Ellis
Special Status Plants		1/22/13 S Ellis
Water Resources	*NO*	1/22/13 S Ellis
Wastes, Hazardous/solid	*NO*	1/28/13 L Ford
Wetlands/Riparian Zone	*NO*	1/22/13 S Ellis
Wild and Scenic Rivers	*NO*	1/28/13 SB
Wilderness Management	***YES***	1/22/2013 md
Wildlife Habitat/Species	***YES***	1/22/2013 S Ellis
Fire management	*NO*	1/28/2013 L Ford
Land Use	*NO*	1/23/13 E Hansen
Mineral resources	*NO*	1/23/13 R Porter
Paleontology	*NO*	1/28/13 L Ford
Recreation	***YES***	1/22/2013 md
Livestock Management	*NO*	1/23/2013 SF
Soils	***YES***	1/22/13 S Ellis
Socioeconomic resources	*NO*	1/23/13 L Ford
Vegetation	***YES***	1/22/13 S Ellis
Visual resources	***YES***	1/22/2013 md

Branch Chief Steve Bonar Date 1/28/13
Steve Bonar

NEPA Compliance Lori Ford Date 1/28/13
Lori Ford

APPENDIX B
STIPULATIONS FOR SMALL DISTURBANCES OF DESERT TORTOISE HABITAT IN THE CALIFORNIA DESERT

Golden Valley Wilderness Vehicle Barriers and Wing Fences

Stipulations

The following measures shall be incorporated into the project mitigation measures.

a. The project proponent shall designate a field contact representative (FCR) who will be responsible for overseeing compliance with protective stipulations for the Desert tortoise and for coordination on compliance with the BLM. The FCR must be on-site during all project activities. The FCR shall have the authority to halt all project activities that are in violation of the stipulations. The FCR shall have a copy of all stipulations when work is being conducted on the site. The FCR may be a crew chief or field supervisor, a project manager, any other employee of the project proponent, or a contracted biologist.

b. All employees of the project proponent who work on-site as well as all volunteers shall participate in a tortoise education program prior to initiation of field activities. The BLM is responsible for ensuring that the education program is developed and presented prior to conducting activities. The program may consist of a class presented by a BLM biologist or a video. Wallet-sized cards or a one-page handout with important information for workers to carry are recommended. The program shall cover the following topics at a minimum:

- distribution of the Desert tortoise,
- general behavior and ecology of the tortoise,
- sensitivity to human activities,
- legal protection,
- penalties for violations of State or Federal laws,
- reporting requirements, and
- project protective mitigation measures.

c. No tortoises shall be handled as part of this project.

d. The area of disturbance shall be confined to the smallest practical area, considering topography, placement of facilities, location of burrows, public health and safety, and other limiting factors. Work area boundaries shall be delineated with flagging or other marking to minimize surface disturbance associated with vehicle straying. Special habitat features, such as burrows, identified by the qualified biologist shall be avoided to the extent possible. To the extent possible, previously disturbed areas within the project site shall be utilized for the stockpiling of excavated materials, storage of equipment, location of office trailers, and parking of vehicles. The qualified biologist, in consultation with the project proponent, shall ensure compliance with this measure.

e. Where practical, no access road shall be bladed to the project site. Cross-country access shall be the standard for temporary activities. For development activities, a short driveway (no more than 0.3 miles) from the nearest access road may be constructed if necessary. To the extent possible, access to the project site shall be restricted to designated "open" routes of travel. A qualified biologist shall select and flag the access route, whether cross-country or bladed, to avoid burrows and to minimize disturbance of vegetation. All constructed access roads are to be considered temporary; after project abandonment (or completion, if a short-term activity); the route shall be rehabilitated using ripping, raking, and other accepted techniques.

   Except when absolutely required by the project and as explicitly stated in the project permit, cross-country vehicle use by employees is prohibited during work and non-work hours.

k. No later than 90 days after completion of construction or termination of activities, the FCR and BLM biologist shall prepare a report. The report shall document the effectiveness and practicality of the mitigation measures and information on any tortoises observed. The report may make recommendations for modifying the stipulations to enhance tortoise protection or to make it more workable. The report shall provide an estimate of the actual acreage disturbed by various aspects of the operation.

l. Upon locating a dead or injured tortoise, the FCR is to notify the BLM Field Office. The BLM must then notify the appropriate field office (Carlsbad or Ventura) of the USFWS by telephone within three days of the finding. Written notification must be made within five days of the finding, both to the appropriate USFWS field office and to the USFWS Division of Law Enforcement in Torrance. The information provided must include the date and time of the finding or incident (if known), location of the carcass or injured animal, a photograph, cause of death, if known, and other pertinent information.

   An injured animal shall be transported to a qualified veterinarian for treatment at the expense of the project proponent. If an injured animal recovers, the appropriate field office of USFWS should be contacted for final disposition of the animal.

   The BLM shall endeavor to place the remains of intact tortoise carcasses with educational or research institutions holding the appropriate State and Federal permits per their instructions. If such institutions are not available or the animal's remains are in poor condition, the information noted above shall be obtained and the carcass left in place. If left in place and sufficient pieces are available, the BLM (or its agent) shall attempt to mark the carcass to ensure that it is not reported again. Arrangements for disposition to a museum shall be made prior to removal of the carcass from the field.

m. Except on county-maintained roads, vehicle speeds shall not exceed 20 miles per hour through Desert tortoise habitat.

n. Workers shall inspect for tortoises under a vehicle prior to moving it. If a tortoise is present, the worker shall carefully move the vehicle only when necessary and when the tortoise

would not be injured by moving the vehicle or shall wait for the tortoise to move out from under the vehicle.

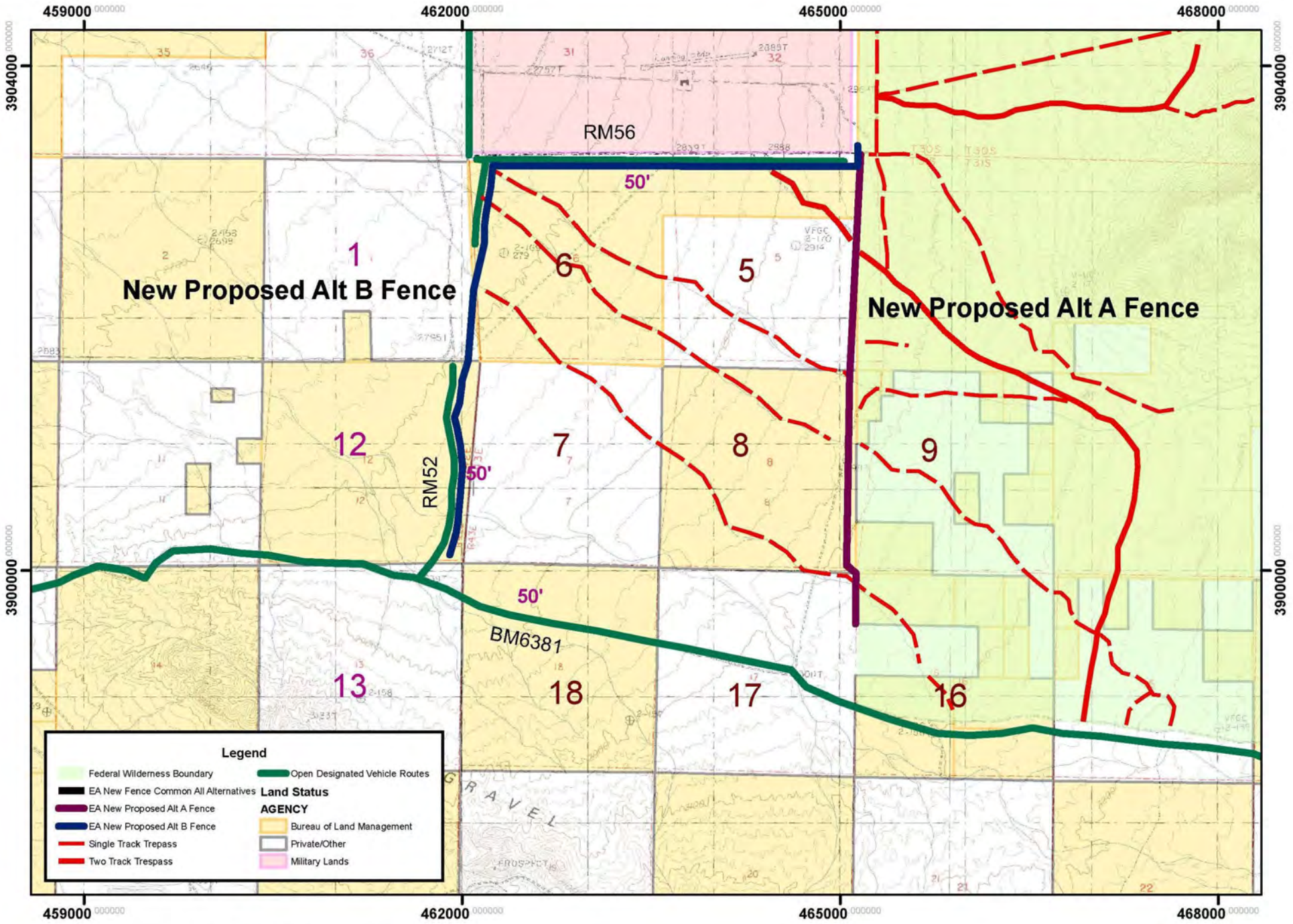
o. No dogs shall be allowed at a work site in Desert tortoise habitat.

p. All trash and food items shall be promptly contained within closed, raven-proof containers. These shall be regularly removed from the project site to reduce the attractiveness of the area to ravens and other tortoise predators.

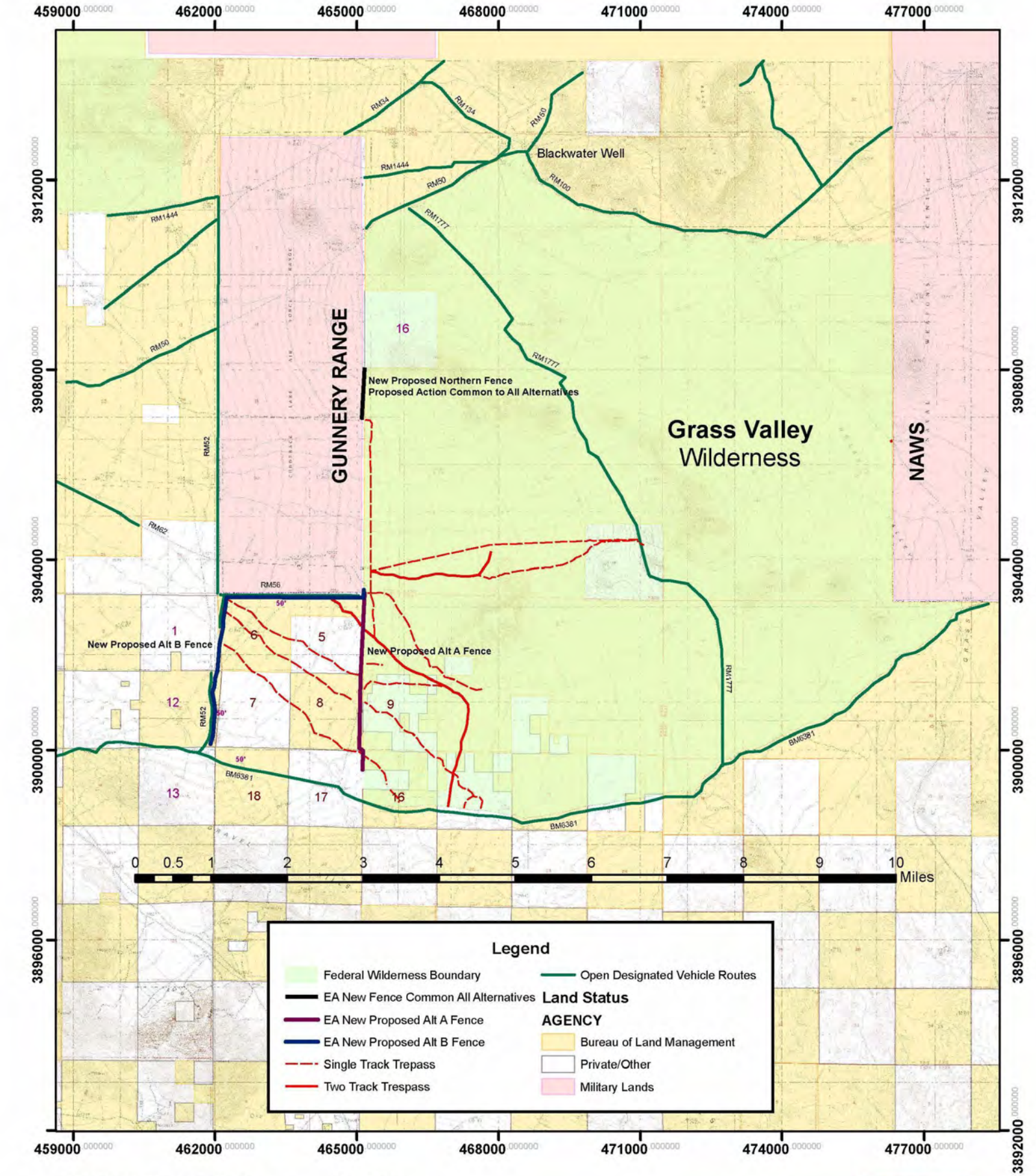
q. Project proponents shall stockpile any vegetation grubbed or bladed from the project site and access road. Following completion of the project, the access road and project site (if a temporary disturbance) shall be recontoured to approximate pre-project condition and the stockpiled vegetation randomly spread across the recontoured area. [Due to the variation in substrate types, additional revegetation measures (e.g., imprinting, reseeding) shall be considered.] After site rehabilitation, all tortoise-proof fences shall be removed.

APPENDIX C

MAPS



FY2012-2013 DETAIL Alt A & B Fences
Proposed Grass Valley Wilderness
& Resource Protection Fences



FY2012-2013 Composite Map
Proposed Grass Valley Wilderness & Resource Protection Fences